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Secretary of State



Records Management for Local Government Agencies

RI Department of State | State Archives & Public
Records Administration

Local Government
Records Program



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ABOUT US

The Rhode Island State Archives and Public Records Administration is part of the Division of Archives, Library, and Public Information within the Office of the Secretary of State. We are responsible for the following:

- The State Archives preserves and makes available for research Rhode Island's historical public records from 1638 – present;
- The Public Records Administration provides records management assistance and storage services to state agencies; and
- We also provide advice on records management to Local Government.

For reference view: R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-1, § 38-3, and 42-8.1



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THIS PRESENTATION

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1. Definitions
2. Records Retention Schedules
3. Storage and Environment
4. Disposition of Records
5. Email and Electronic Records
6. Preservation



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IS IT A PUBLIC RECORD?

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The crucial factor in deciding whether a document is a public record depends on its function and contents, not the physical means used to create, send, and keep the document. (Reference: R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-1-1.1).

Questions to ask yourself:

1. Do the contents concern public business?
2. Does it serve a public function?
3. Whose office is it from?



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IS IT A PUBLIC RECORD?

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Public Records can be any media and come in many forms, such as:

Correspondence [paper, email, text documents]	Spreadsheets	Plans and blueprints
Maps/GIS	Textual documents	Web content, blogs
Work Calendars	Diagrams, drawings, pictorial and graphic works	Photographs and film
Sound recordings	Databases	Video recordings



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WHAT IS AN ESSENTIAL RECORD?

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- COOP and disaster plans (ri.dplan.org)
- Land titles and deeds
- Leases
- Payroll
- Tax records
- Insurance policies
- Historical documents



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WHAT IS RECORDS MANAGEMENT?

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1. Management of records and information that support the short-term business and long-term interests of an organization;
2. Classification, filing, storage, retention and disposition policies (preserve or destroy); and
3. The care of records for their entire life cycle.



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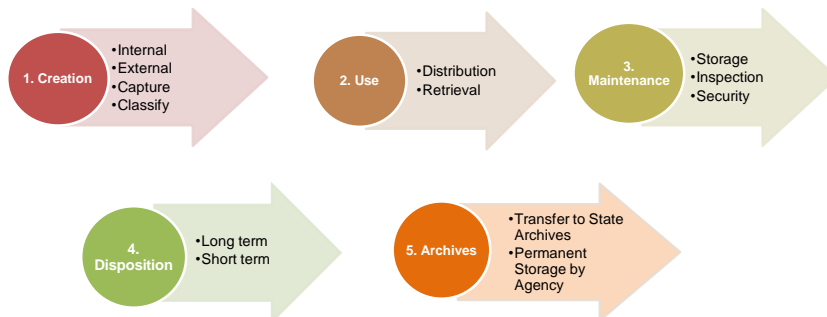
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Life Cycle of a Record

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You are responsible to maintain records for their entire life cycle, regardless of format.



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WHY RECORDS MANAGEMENT?

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We manage Public Records because they:

- Provide **documentary evidence** of all agency business activities;
- Enhance **government transparency**, responsiveness, and public trust;
- Ensure **continuity of government** operations, **recovery from disasters**;
- **Protect** state and citizen rights and interests;
- Promote better grounded agency **decision making**; and
- Preserve **institutional memory**.



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WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AND YOUR TEAM'S ROLE?

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Agencies bear responsibility for the establishment of records management programs and for the proper management of their records. You need to ensure that your team is knowledgeable about how to ...

- **Identify** public records in all media for appropriate care;
- **Organize/classify** and file records in a consistent way across the agency so that you and your staff can retrieve them quickly when you, fellow workers, other agencies, or the public needs to consult them; and
- **Maintain** records in good order and condition so that they remain usable for as long as they need to be retained.



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OUTCOMES OF POOR RECORDS MANAGEMENT

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- An inability to properly perform the core mission;
- An inability to resume operations after a disaster;
- Legal penalties for failure to find and produce records;
- Public distrust due to inability to produce controversial or requested records; and
- Costs for remediation of damaged records that have not yet met retention.



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OUTCOMES OF GOOD RECORDS MANAGEMENT

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- Ability to properly perform the core mission;
- Effectively retrieve and dispose records;
- Ensure regulatory compliance;
- Safeguard important information;
- Cut costs and save time and effort;
- Better management decision making;
- Preserve agency knowledge; and
- Control the generation and growth of records.



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WHAT IS A RETENTION SCHEDULE?

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What is a Retention Schedule?

A document establishing the official retention, maintenance, and disposal requirements for a series or type of record based on administrative, legal, fiscal, and historical values for the scheduled records.

(Reference R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-3-2)



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WHAT IS A RETENTION SCHEDULE?

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Municipal Departments Records Retention Schedules (LG)

- Records Schedules specific to Local Government Departments.

Agency Specific Schedules

- Agency-specific schedules govern the retention and disposition of records unique to a particular state agency's programs and functions.

General Schedules (GRS)

- General Records Schedules cover the types of records created or received by all state and local government agencies.

Current Schedules

- Approved schedules can be accessed online, at
<http://sos.ri.gov/divisions/frequent-filers/records-management>



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BREAKING DOWN THE RETENTION SCHEDULE

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Department of Business Regulation
Fire Safety Code Board of Appeal and Review
Records Retention Schedule
Approved September 2013, Amended June 2018

Record Series Number → **Record Series Name** → **Record Series Description** → **Retention Period (How long it must be kept)**

FB1 Fire Safety Code Board of Appeal and Review
Variance Decisions

The Fire Safety Code Board of Appeal and Review (hereinafter Fire Board) has the responsibility for deciding whether or not appeals for variances from certain aspects of the State Fire Safety Code are granted or not as per RIGL § 23-28-3-5. Upon the adoption of the Fire Safety Code, there was the realization that certain situations would arise that would render strict compliance impossible. The aforementioned law establishes a procedure for building owners and/or operators to request relief from specific clauses of the Fire Safety Code. The Board then considers whether or not to grant these variances, which may take various forms. A variance of time may be granted to give an owner/operator time to comply with some aspect of the Fire Code that a structure is not yet equipped for. A variance may also be granted for structural hardship if strict compliance is impossible because of the existing structure of the facility. A variance may also allow for an alternative method of compliance with the intent of the code if the usual method is not feasible for a particular structure. The Board has the authority to render decisions on appeals for variances and holds hearings to determine whether or not to grant them. The records in this series include the decisions issued by the Board. The Fire Safety Code Board of Appeal and Review provides a copy of each decision rendered to the State Fire Marshal.

Retention: Retain ten (10) years after the conclusion of the code cycle under which the variance was granted or denied.

Note: Per § 23-28-3-5 (b): A properly indexed record of all variances made shall be kept in the office of the state fire marshal and shall be open to public inspection. (The State Fire Marshal retains the record permanently.)

FB2 Variance Application Files

Building owners and/or operators provide the Fire Board with applications when seeking variances in the Fire Safety Code as per RIGL § 23-28-3-6. The applications contain background information on the structure involved and other documents. Additional documents in support of the application may be provided during the hearing. The files may include, but are not limited to, application forms filled out by building owners and/or operators, copies of the most recent plan reports or inspection report for the subject building (prepared by the State or Local Fire Marshal's office), related correspondence, and plans.

a) Granted or denied variances

Retention: Retain three (3) years after the mailing date of the Administrative Decision.



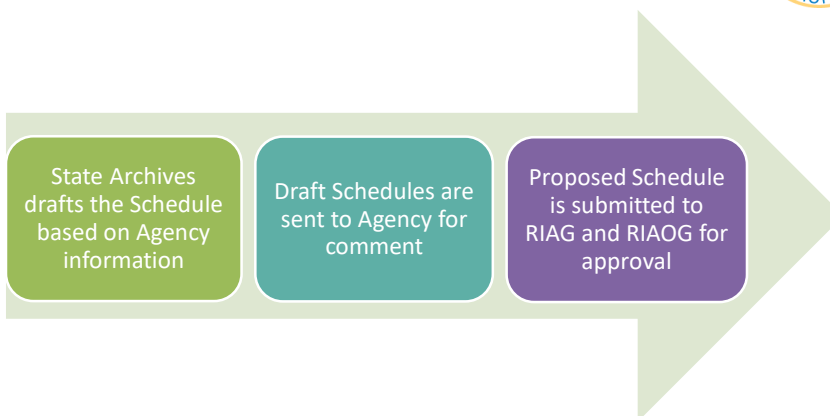
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CREATION OF A RETENTION SCHEDULE

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DESIGNATING STORAGE

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- Make it secure – locked, fire/water alarms;
- Keep it dry – not near water or sewer pipes;
- Maintain a pest-free, contaminant free environment; and
- Prohibit storage of non-record materials.



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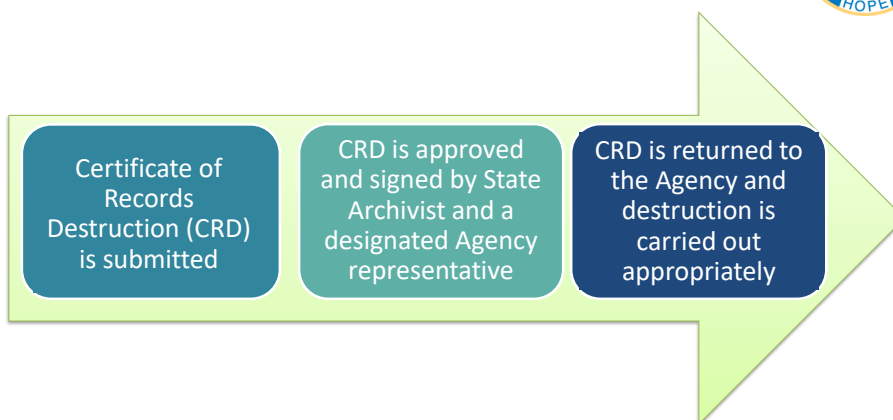


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DESTRUCTION AND DISPOSITION

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WHAT ARE ELECTRONIC RECORDS?

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- Electronic Mail;
- Digitized (scanned records);
- Word processed documents;
- Database management systems; and
- Web-based pages.



Image: <https://esigrecords.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Policies-Protocols-and-Procedure.jpg>



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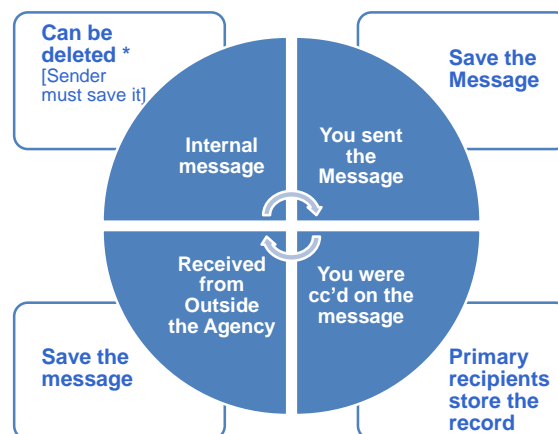


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What do I save?

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*unless edited or updated by you



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Organizing Your Mailbox

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Imagine people need to find your information quickly

- Determine the category of the record.
- Think in terms of file folders with names or titles.
- Your Agency Records Control Schedule is your best guide.

Organizing means Naming + Classifying + Filing

- Save the entire email with all header/footer information and all previous messages in the thread.
- Save all associated attachments (unless they are completely irrelevant to the message).
- Apply your organization's file naming conventions (if available) or use meaningful file names when saving email.



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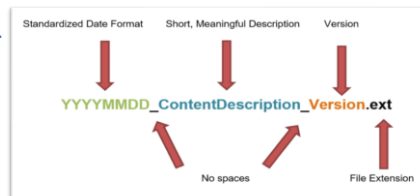
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File Naming Guidance

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- Keep file names short, but meaningful.
- Use only alpha-numeric characters.
- Do not use spaces.
- Put the most important information first.
- Include dates and format them consistently.
- Include a version number.
- Use leading zeros when using sequential numbering.
- Don't overwrite file extensions.
- Be consistent.



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Email Best Practices

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- Limit the email to one main topic to ensure accuracy in filing/classifying the message, when possible.
- Use meaningful subject lines that reflect the content of the email message.
- Use meaningful and descriptive titles on email attachments.
- Be careful with personal comments and opinions – they will become part of the record.



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DIGITIZING PUBLIC RECORDS

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- Step 1:** **Draft a policy (review annually)**
Considerations: What is your preservation plan? What will be the strategy to maintain the records in electronic format? How will you convert or migrate the records?
- Step 2:** **Determine the “official” copy of the record**
Considerations: R.I. Gen. Laws Chapter 42-127.1 – Uniform Electronic Transactions Act.
- Step 3:** **Identify scanning requirements based on record retention**
Consult the regulation and standards.
A Digital Preservation Plan is required for records with a retention of 10+ years.

The Key: You must be able to support and provide access to records for the entire lifecycle.



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In Review

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- **Records Management Accountability** Establish accountability for the identification and safekeeping of all agency public records in order to adequately document or provide evidence of agency activities.
- **Public Records – All Media** Know that the content and function, not the medium, determine whether a document is a public record. Public records may exist in any format.
- **Records Retention Schedules** - Understand that identifying and codifying classes of non-permanent and permanent agency records lies at the heart of effective information/records management.
- **Timely Disposal** - Attend to the timely disposal of eligible non-permanent records
- **Records Preservation** - Develop appropriate safeguards, preservation policies, strategies, and procedures for long-term and permanent records and information.



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Rules of Thumb

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- 5% of records are considered essential records
- The first time you apply retention schedules can be time consuming.
- Generally, 33% of records are eligible for immediate disposal.
- After that, records eligible for destruction per the approved schedules and regardless of media type, should be destroyed on an annual basis (CY or FY).
- Generally, 3-5% of records have permanent historical value.



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Questions?

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